

MINORITY ADDITIONAL VIEWS, FY2001

The decision to support the Majority's Views and Estimates is a difficult one because the report they offer fails to meet its fundamental legislative mandate: providing a five-year funding recommendation for those agencies under our jurisdiction. Even those of us who are supporting the report don't really know what we are endorsing because the report is silent on out-year funding. On balance, largely out of consideration for the courteous and bipartisan fashion in which the Chairman has managed the Committee, some of us have decided to sign onto the report with these additional views.

Contributing to our reluctance to sign on is a lengthy analysis which describes the President's healthy 6.2 percent FY2001 civilian R&D increase without embracing it and which criticizes the Administration's out-year funding (FY2002-2005) without suggesting what the Majority would do instead. In short, the Majority has adopted a critical tone without ever finding the voice to stake a clear position in opposition to the Administration.

For example, in expressing concern for the flat out-year funding in the President's budget, the Majority note that this "budget fails to meet the stable and sustainable funding criteria needed for science and technology programs in the out-years." This statement echoes a standard first espoused in the 1998 Science Policy Report produced by the Majority. However, neither that report, nor this Views and Estimates report, ever explains what is meant by the touchstone of "stable and sustainable funding." Optimistically, this could be interpreted as steady annual funding increases. But with multiple opportunities to just say that, in plain language, the Majority has never done so. Just as easily, this same standard could be a steady, predictable downward trend that leads to slowly declining budgets. In a tough fiscal environment of growing deficits, that would be an unsurprising (though disappointing) "stable and sustainable funding profile."

The report's criticism of the President's flat out-year request is also overstated for reasons that are all too obvious to anyone who has seen two or three budget cycles: out-years for most agencies are

always projected as flat or declining in real terms. This seems to be the result of OMB's machinations. Every Administration's budget states that out-year figures represent an administration's intention, but should not be considered binding at the agency or program level. Not surprisingly, many of the numbers in the FY2001 request have moved upward substantially from those in last year's budget for civilian R&D. The same will be true next year, and not simply because of the November election.

Notwithstanding these critiques, we are happy to see the Majority endorse the Administration's robust NSF request. Though the Committee has yet to take up a FY 2001 NSF authorization bill, we believe the President's request will receive strong support in Committee and we concur in the Majority's recommendation. This bill will also provide the Majority with the opportunity to propose some out-year increases for the steady and stable funding they advocate, although we were disappointed that the Majority failed to carve out a position on what those out-year amounts should be. We would suggest that, for the Budget Committee's purposes, increases to the FY2001 request at the rate of inflation projected for the out-years would be a reasonable first approximation pending action by the Science Committee on an authorization bill.

Where there are numbers in the Majority's report, they are largely those for FY2001 (and not for the out-years) endorsed in the authorization bills passed in the first session. Because we supported those authorizations, we certainly support those numbers. The use of Committee-adopted authorization numbers, coupled with the Chairman's fair treatment of the Minority, are the two considerations that allow us to sign on to the report. However, changes in scientific opportunities, administration priorities and fiscal conditions have set the stage for an administration request that may not always track with our authorized levels for FY2001. We respectfully ask that, unless the Administration can make a compelling case for deviation from our authorized levels, the Budget Committee generally treat our authorizations as the guide for funding of our agencies.

Finally, the Majority provides a great deal of detailed programmatic information to the Budget Committee. It is not clear to what purpose this information will be put since the Budget Committee works at such

a high level of aggregation, but many Minority Members of the Committee do not agree with the descriptions of certain programs in this report. It would be tedious for all concerned to read a long list of where we differ and why—not just on what is listed, but in what is left out. Further, we do not believe it would serve a constructive purpose for the Budget Committee’s work.

One exception to this general observation is the Advanced Technology Program. The Majority’s report suggests that ATP should be put on a funding path that freezes out new grants and simply funds existing grants. Inevitably, in the course of one or two more years, the program would shut down. This cannot be the Science Committee’s position since the Committee has not completed work this Congress on H.R. 1744, the NIST authorization bill. We strongly disagree with the recommendation that the program be put in a death spiral. On ATP, we would encourage the Budget Committee to allocate enough space in the budget category that includes NIST to accommodate the Administration’s request.

Despite our reservations towards the Majority’s report, we support its substance, tempered by our constructive criticism and principled opposition to particular elements of that report. While we are not clairvoyant, we anticipate that Committee Democrats may carry the burden of creating a Views and Estimates report in the not-too-distant future. We expect some similar forbearance from our Republican colleagues in such future errors they feel we have stumbled into. We also hope that they would offer similarly constructive advice so as to improve our efforts should that responsibility fall to us.

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